

Csaba Ötvös

Worship and Creation

Some Remarks on Concepts of Prayer in the Ancient Gnosis¹

Abstract: In the diverse and heterogeneous traditions, groups, movements and pseudo- or anonymous writings—that could be labelled as ancient Gnostic literature from the second and third Christian centuries—prayer was obviously a characteristic feature and their prayer practices likewise had a fundamental place and role in their devotional life. The paper explores the relevant selected texts that exemplify prayer, its spherical and earthly practices, that also imply the concepts of creation or the created, physical world, with the purpose of investigating their negative view and hostility exhibited towards the creator and the created order.

Keywords: prayer; true/mental prayer; soul; Sophia; creation; metanoia; repentance; ancient Gnosis; Nag Hammadi Library; Church Fathers; early Christian theologies

1 Introduction

ΑΥΧΝΟΥϞ ΝΒΙ ΝΕΦΜΑΘΗΤΗΣ ΠΕΧΛΥ ΝΑϞ ΧΕΚ'ΟΥΩΩ ΕΤΡΗΡΗΝΗΣΤΕΥΕ ΑΥΩ ΕΩ ΤΕ ΘΕ
ΕΝΑΩΛΗΛ ΕΝΑϞ ΕΛΕΗΜΟΣΥΝΗ ΑΥΩ ΕΝΑΡΠΑΡΑΤΗΡΕΙ ΕΟΥ ΝΒΙΟΥΩΜ ΠΕΧΕ ΙϞ ΧΕ
ΜΠΡΧΕ ΒΟΛ ΑΥΩ ΠΕΤΕΤΜΜΟСТЕ НМОϞ МПРΑΑϞ ΧΕ СЕΒΟΛП' ΤΗΡΟΥ ΕΒΟΛ ΜΠΕΜΤΟ
ΕΒΟΛ ΝΤΠΕ ΜΝ ΑΑΥ ΓΑΡ ΕϞΖΗП' ΕϞΝΑΟΥΩΝΖ ΕΒΟΛ ΑΝ ΑΥΩ ΜΝ ΑΑΥ ΕϞΖΟΒϞ
ΕΥΝΑΒΩ ΟΥΕΩΝ ΒΟΛΠϞ.

His disciples questioned him and said to him: Do you want us to fast? How shall we pray? Shall we give alms? What diet shall we observe? Jesus said, Do not tell lies and do not do what you hate, for all things are plain in the sight of heaven.² For nothing hidden will not become manifest, and nothing covered will remain without being uncovered.” (Gospel of Thomas 6).³

¹ The research was supported by the OTKA project PD 112421.

² The Greek fragment, P.Oxy. 654, 32-40 has two differences. It does not include the last sentence and it has a different reading (in view of truth. For this, see e.g. POKORNY, A Commentary, 44.

³ LAYTON, Nag Hammadi, 1: 54-55. For the Coptic quotations I used the Coptic Workplace 1.1. Silver Mountain Software, Canada, 1983.

In the parallel sayings from the Synoptic tradition Jesus instructs the disciples and gives orders “when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret.” or “When you fast, put oil on your head, and wash your face.” Here comes the most important help, the command, a model for the disciples, the Lord’s prayer: And “when you pray, pray like this, [saying], ‘Our Father, who art in heaven...’.”

In the Gospel of Thomas⁴ Jesus gives no such instructions. As we heard, his answers are like a koan (as Pagels noted it) with the aim to discover the capacity of knowing.⁵ There are, however, other scholarly opinions concerning the logion. In the history of research, while restoring the Greek fragment, Fitzmyer pointed out that Jesus does not answer the questions but insists on other things.⁶ Finn wrote that it might mean that unexceptionable but overvalued practices are subordinated to the more important business of honesty and avoiding wrong-doings:

If, however, fasting and almsgiving are understood as forms of penitential prayer, ways of seeking forgiveness, then the saying should be interpreted as a rejection of these practices, because the disciples were to avoid those sins which necessitated them.⁷

He called attention to distinguishing between the question of whether to pray and the answer of how to pray.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to detail the relevant scholarly dispute. We would only like to draw attention to the fact that the views on fasting, almsgiving and praying were varied already in the earliest Christian traditions.⁸ Our present question comes from this point of controversy over religious practices. In what follows I will make an attempt to point out that in its history of exegeti-

⁴ In scholarly literature the date of composition of the original text of Thomas ranges between the mid-first and mid-second century CE. The *terminus ante quem* is based on the evidence of the Greek fragments of P.Oxy. 1, 654 and 655, which are generally considered to represent an older version than the Coptic text. These fragments have been dated between 200 and 250. With regard to the socio-historical setting, scholars have proposed different views concerning the identity of Thomas as, for instance, an early independent Gospel, an early Gospel dependent on the canonical Gospels, a Gnostic Gospel, and an “encratite” (strictly ascetic) gospel, respectively. On this see e.g. PATTERSON, *The Gospel of Thomas*.

⁵ PAGELS, *Beyond Belief*, 25.

⁶ FITZMYER, *The Oxyrhynchus Logoi*, 528-529.

⁷ FINN, *Asceticism*, 69.

⁸ On this see e.g. FINN, *Asceticism*; MCGOWAN, *Ascetic Eucharist*; CULLMANN, *Early Christian Worship*; CABANIS, *Pattern in Early Christian*; HURTADO, *At the Origins*; and IDEM, *Lord Jesus Christ*.

cal traditions this short saying serves not only as a reference to rejecting or accepting worship, but also as a text that underpins the cosmological teachings in the ancient Gnostic systems.⁹

Before this examination it is necessary to make some introductory remarks. If we intend to investigate the phenomenon of worship in the ancient Gnosis, we are confronted with a number of methodological problems which increases if we try to shift our focus to the theological teachings involved. Firstly, one has to distinguish between the primary sources from Nag Hammadi Library and other codices and the secondary sources. Most of the relevant passages come from the secondary sources, from the accounts of the Church Fathers,¹⁰ that means, from the heresiological literature with their terms, concepts and points of views, and these are therefore only of limited benefit, if any at all, for the investigation of the practice or theory of the Gnostic worship. According to the accounts of the Fathers, certain groups of the heretics, the leaders and their disciples have their own worship with cultic practices (liturgical formulae, traces of ritual acts, mystagogical instructions, ritual settings, liturgical events and processes, invocations, sacrificial imagery and phraseology, prayers are referred to in the accounts) and with their own system of speculation. On the other hand, from the primary sources we know almost nothing about practices (e.g. whether they paid homage to statues, offered sacrifices to them, prostrations, etc.). These sources preserved only the prayers with their forms and contents.

Secondly, the primary sources are preserved only in translation of the late third or the beginning of the fourth century. The principal obstacle lies, however, in the symbolic language and the obscure mythical and theological backgrounds of the writings. It is a never ending question whether the primary sources have any connection with practice, or these are only spiritual/allegorical interpretations of contemporary religious—probably Christian—practices. This very fact makes it frequently difficult to distinguish the mythical story from the theological reflections and to identify any organization or organized community with—a particular piece of—developed liturgy. Lastly, we should note the central claim to be perfect, to have access to the *gnosis*: the insight, that is, the organizing principle, which holds the consubstantiality of

⁹ If it is unavoidable, I use the term of ancient gnosis as a category—keeping in mind the opinion of the current scholarly literature, see e.g. WILLIAMS, *Rethinking Gnosticism*; and BROEK, *Gnostic Religion in Antiquity*—and hope that its meaning will become clearer in the case of the texts under examination here.

¹⁰ The Platonic Philosophers, as Celsus (with the Alethes logos) and Plotinus (with his II,9 tractate) play a smaller role in the examination of worship in the ancient gnosis.

knower, known and knowledge¹¹ in these systems.¹² Moreover, this concept of gnosis—that is at the same time knowledge of God and man and reveals the secrets of creation—is a definitive feature of these systems and cannot be avoided in the evaluation of the questions of worship (whether individual or communal), its sources, references and connotations and particularly the relationship of worshipper and deity.

Keeping in mind these observations and the results of the scholarly literature concerning ancient gnostic worship, liturgy, ritual initiations, cults practices,¹³ my paper, when turning to the collection of quotations from the primary and secondary sources regarding the question of worship, will focus on a smaller but in itself noteworthy and not negligible part. This paper covers only the selected texts that contain concepts and interpretations of prayer and its spherical and earthly practices and representations. This detailed observation and the questions are built on the results of the scholarly works that have been completed partly on the Nag Hammadi writings,¹⁴ partly on the various prayer culture in antiquity.¹⁵ In order to be able to operate with this diverse and complex material, we need a second viewpoint to limit our scope: the reference to creation and the creation of the world with the aim of investigating their negative view of and hostility to the Creator and the created order.

In what follows I introduce a short collection of quotations that have clear references to prayer and at the same time include the concept of creation or the created world. The collection is not exhaustive but hopefully it is lengthy enough to show the colourful and complex concepts of prayer in the ancient gnosis.¹⁶

The present examination has two aims. The first one is to see more clearly these gnostic speculations on prayer. In order to do so, I will explore these texts and investigate their exegetical methodologies and theological functions within these systems. The second aim concentrates on polemical implications. In this

¹¹ RUDOLPH, *Erkenntnis und Heil*, 14-33.

¹² I do not use the term Gnostic as a social category.

¹³ E.g. TRIPP, *Worship*; LOGAN, *The Mystery*, TURNER, *Ritual in Gnosticism*.

¹⁴ The concept of prayer among the gnostics was already disputed in scholarly literature, see esp. Segelberg, *Prayer Among the Gnostics*; and MacRae, *Prayer and Knowledge of Self*.

¹⁵ E.g. Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer*, Johnson, *Prayer in the Apocrypha*, Phillips, *Prayer in the first four centuries*.

¹⁶ At this point we should note that there were groups who denied the necessity of prayer and rejected it, e.g. Prodikos and his followers (see Clement of Alexandria: *Strom.* VII 41.1-2). This theory is attacked by Origen in his *Treatise of Prayer* (V-VIII). Later I will return to this question.

part of the investigation I will turn to the close context of the passages and make an attempt to point out the main polemical aspects between these writings and the related Jewish and Christian theories and practices. With the results the paper intends to make a modest contribution to the ongoing scholarly debate on the development of the inner, silent and spiritual prayer.

All selected examples present one aspect of prayer. Due to the limits of this paper I will not deal with their supposedly liturgical connotations in detail and restrict the scope of the examination to the abovementioned aspects. Every quotation refers to a different type of prayer but hopefully I can demonstrate that these disputed speculations of the ancient gnostic literature should be ranked into one theological position.

2 The Gospel of Thomas (Gos. Thom.).

Let us return to the Gos. Thom. from where I quote two other logia that refer to the themes of fasting, prayer and alms-giving (6, and 27 is without prayer).

As some researcher ascertained, the answer to the questions of the quoted saying seems to appear in the first part of the 14th saying:

πεχε ιϛ ναυ ξε ετετῆσανῖνηστεγε тетна.χο πο нтн̄ нноунобе аѡ
 ететῆσανѡла' сенаῖκατaкрine ммωтн̄ аѡ ететῆсан̄т̄ елеһмосуһ
 ететнаеиρε νοуκακoн̄ ннетῆπῖн̄ аѡ ететῆсанбоκ' εζοуη ека2 ним аѡ
 нтетῆмооѡе 2н̄ нхωpa eyѡaῖπαpαaεxe ммωтн̄ петoунакаaаq 2apωтн̄ oуomq̄
 netѡone н2htoу epieepaπeγe ммooу петнабоκ 2aῖ εζοуη 2н̄ тетῆтаπpo
 qна.χω2н̄ тһутн̄ аη̄ аλλα петῆнһу eбоa' 2н̄ тетῆтаπpo нtoq петна.χa2н̄ тһутн̄
 Jesus said to them: If you fast you will bring sin upon yourselves, and if you pray you will
 be condemned, and if you give to charity you will harm your spirits. When you go into any
 region and walk through the countryside, and people receive you, eat what they serve you
 and heal the sick among them. What goes into your mouth will not defile you, but what
 comes out of your mouth will defile you.

The first part of the saying is especially important for our investigation. The thematic parallel with the abovementioned saying is clear enough to accept the scholarly opinion, namely, that it may once have stood as Jesus' direct answer to the disciples' question, perhaps in a postulated sayings collection which served as a source for the Gospel of Thomas. It is also possible that its present position in the Nag Hammadi codex is due to a copyist's error.¹⁷ If we accept the

¹⁷ For this, see the suggestion of DAVIES, *The Gospel of Thomas*, 153.

opinion of Finn, we could say that the saying works by paradox or irony: the very fasting and almsgiving which are wrongly thought by many to be redemptive, purgative of sin, in fact constitute sins.¹⁸ The three religious practices could refer to Jewish religious activities as an anti-Jewish rule¹⁹ but the logion is far from the warning of the formal behaviours with its New Testament allusions.

The first part of the saying reacts to the abovementioned saying (echoing Matt 6:1-18²⁰) and supports the readers to leave behind the hypocrite method, to liberate themselves from these acts of piety and find a true practice. This saying, repeating the former one, gives again an instruction for fasting and praying with its critical attitudes.

This negative statement concerning prayer appears in the 104th saying:

ΠΕΧΑΥ Ν[Ι]Ϛ ΧΕ ΑΜΟΥ ΝΤΗΨΛΗΛ' ΜΠΟΟΥ ΑΥΩ ΝΤΗΡΝΗΣΤΕΥΕ ΠΕΧΕ ΙϚ ΧΕ ΟΥ ΓΑΡ ΠΕ
ΠΝΟΒΕ ΝΤΑΕΙΑΔ' Η ΝΤΑΥΧΡΟ ΕΡΟΕΙ ΖΗ ΟΥ ΑΛΛΑ ΖΟΤΑΝ ΕΡΨΑΝ ΠΝΥΜΦΙΟΣ ΕΙ ΕΒΟΛ
ΖΗ ΠΝΥΜΦΩΝ ΤΟΤΕ ΜΑΡΟΥΝΗΣΤΕΥΕ ΑΥΩ ΜΑΡΟΥΨΛΗΛ'

They said to Jesus: Come let us pray today and fast. Jesus said: What sin have I committed or how have I been undone? When the bridegroom leaves the bridal chamber, then let the people fast and pray.

The logion may indicate the denial of the duty of prayer. In this case unnamed persons (probably disciples) ask Jesus, but his answer is similarly a condemnation. This reworking of the Synoptic saying concerning the bridegroom (Mark 2:19-20, etc.) may imply that the Gospel of Thomas rejected all voluntary fasting but recognized the communal fast immediately before Easter.²¹ The logion adds the motif of prayer to the Synoptic verses. Scholarly literature concentrates on what is understood by leaving the bridal chamber in the logion. Buckley collected the various opinions: Ménard says that since the true Gnostic never leaves the bridal chamber, the traditional religious prescriptions need not be followed. Buckley criticized this statement and said that such an interpretation appears ill-chosen, for both the disciples and Jesus may leave the chamber. In fact, most of the disciples have not yet entered, and Jesus warns that he will soon be gone.²² As Buckley noted, Perkins insists that “the Gnostic rejects fast-

¹⁸ FINN, *Asceticism*, 70. He wrote: “Nonetheless, the practice of penitential fasting has been replaced with a metaphorical substitute.”

¹⁹ These three practices appear similarly in the Book of Tobit (12:8). URO, Thomas, 40, mentions Marjanen’s supposition (Thomas and Jewish Religious Practices, in: R. Uro [ed.], Thomas at the Crossroads, Edinburgh 1998, 163-182).

²⁰ EVANS, WEBB and WIEBE, Nag Hammadi, 97-98.

²¹ FINN, *Asceticism*, 70.

²² BUCKLEY quotes Ménard’s opinion, *An Interpretation*, 267.

ing permanently” because neither the disciples nor Jesus ever leave the bridal chamber.²³ Later Tripp extended the scope of his interpretation and stated: “the Synoptic saying has been transformed into a threat against such as reject Jesus as a sinner. Fasting and praying are signs of terror, apt in those who face Jesus as the judge.”²⁴ Dundenberg, inquiring into Jesus’ ego-saying in the Gospel of Thomas, connects our logion with the questions of Jesus’ sinlessness—as did Buckley formerly²⁵—in early Christianity and associated it with John 8:46. However, he leaves the question of dependence open and states: “However, the narrative contexts are too different to suggest a direct literary dependence in either direction.”²⁶

All three examples bear witness to a tradition that has a critical attitude to prayer and it seems to be wholly discountenanced. In the early Christian traditions prayer was quite commonly accepted but these sayings have another parallel example. Clemens of Alexandria mentions the followers of Prodikos (*Strom.* Prot. VII, 7) who also denied the usefulness of prayer and rejected its practice.

All sayings, to be sure, seem to allow for the possibility of fasting and prayer, but the formulation in these sayings could hardly be read as a strong encouragement for the practices.²⁷ All three examples could indicate special rules of the Thomasine community that are to confirm the faithful practices in the framework of institutional regulations.²⁸

3 The Book of Thomas (Bk. Thom.)

The last sentences of the Book of Thomas provide the next example (145:8-16):²⁹

ΠΟΕΙΣ ΕΤΕΤΝΟΠΕ ΧΕ ΕΤΕΤΝΑΨΩΠΕ ΑΝ ΖΝ ΤΣΑΡΖ’ ΑΛΛΑ ΧΕ ΕΤΕΤΝΑΕΙ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΝ
ΤΜΡΡΕ ΜΠΣΙΩΕ ΝΤΕ ΠΒΙΟΣ ΑΥΩ ΕΤΕΤΝΟΠΕ ΤΕΤΝΝΑΒΙΝΕ ΝΟΥΜΤΟΝ ΧΕ ΑΤΕΤΝΚΩ
ΝΣΩΤΝ ΜΠΣΙΕ ΜΝ ΠΝΟΒΕΒ ΝΖΗΤ’ ΕΤΕΤΝΩΑΝΕΙ ΓΑΡ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΝ ΝΖΙΣΕ ΜΝ ΜΠΑΘΟΣ ΝΤΕ
ΠΣΩΜΑ’ ΤΕΤΝΑΧΙ (ΝΟΙΥΑΝΑΠΑΥΣΙΣ ΝΤΟΟΤΓ ΜΠΑΓΑΘΟΣ ΑΥΩ ΤΕΤΝΑΡ ΡΡΟ’ ΜΝ ΠΡΡΟ
ΕΤΕΤΝΗΤΗ’ ΝΜΜΑΔ ΕΓΗΤΗ’ ΝΜΜΗΤΝ ΧΙΝ ΤΕΝΟΥ ΨΑ ΕΝΙΕΙΖ ΝΑΝΕΖ ΖΑΜΗΝ

²³ BUCKLEY, *An Interpretation*.

²⁴ TRIPP, *Worship*, 360-361.

²⁵ BUCKLEY, *An Interpretation*, 267.

²⁶ DUNDENBERG, *The Beloved Disciple*, 112.

²⁷ Cf. URO, *Thomas*, 72, note 92.

²⁸ KIM, *What Shall We Do*, 393-414.

²⁹ LAYTON, *Nag Hammadi*, 2: 204.

Watch and pray that you may not come to be in the flesh, but that you may leave the bondage of the bitterness of this life. And when you pray, you will find rest, for you have left behind the suffering and disgrace. For when you leave the suffering and the passions of the body, you will receive rest from the good one and you will reign with the king, you united with him and he with you, from now on and forever. Amen.

In scholarly literature there is a common opinion that the author seems to reflect on the 2nd saying of Gos. Thom.:

πεχε ις μνηρεφο νοι πετ'ωινε ερωινε ψαντεροβινε αγω ροταν' ερωανβινε
 φνα'ωτ'ρτ'ρ αγω ερωανωτορτ'ρ φναρ' ωπηρε αγω φναρ'ρρο εχμ' πτηρη
 Jesus said, The seeker should not stop seeking until he finds. When he finds, he will be disturbed. When he is disturbed, he will marvel, and will rule over all.

The saying belongs to a group of sayings about seeking and finding. According to scholarly opinion, if there is a link between the Book of Thomas and the Gospel of Thomas, it must be at a relatively early stage in the development of the saying that is earlier than the present Coptic version of the Gospel of Thomas (which omits the motif of rest).³⁰ Whether there is a primitive tradition here is more doubtful. This saying appears to reflect a secondary development, perhaps of the Synoptic saying.³¹

The source of the double imperatives of “watch and pray” could be Matt 26:41 or Mark 14:38 (Luke 22:46 has no “watch”). According to Tuckett, there is a collocation of “finding” and “rest,” and the further connection between “rest” and “reigning” shows that one is within a pattern of motifs witnessed elsewhere in the Christian tradition and not necessarily directly dependent on the Synoptic tradition.³²

Koester wrote that “With respect to all variants of sayings about ‘seeking and finding,’ it is extremely difficult to establish any relationship among them in terms of dependence and development.”³³ His conclusion is that “it is best to posit a written (and/or oral?) tradition or saying which was unrelated to, but still different from Q and the Gospel of Thomas. In this source the theme of “seeking and finding” is not yet formulated as an ecclesiastical admonition for prayer, but reflects the older Sapiential theme of seeking after wisdom, revelation, and salvation.”³⁴ It could be right to elucidate the difference but I am in-

³⁰ KOESTER, *Gnostic Writings as Witnesses*, 242.

³¹ KOESTER, *Gnostic Writings as Witnesses*, 242-244.

³² TUCKETT, *Nag Hammadi*, 86.

³³ KOESTER, *Gnostic Writings as Witnesses*, 243.

³⁴ KOESTER, *Gnostic Writings as Witnesses*, 244.

clined to suggest another solution. Firstly, we should point out, that our version from the Book of Thomas is the only one where the term “pray” occurs. In other words, this term is the writer’s own and illustrates his own alteration. Secondly, if we make an attempt to go further and try to identify the reason behind the alteration of the terminology, we should take into account the structures of the 2nd saying in the Gospel and this version. The result is that our writer used the term “pray” as equivalent to seeking and finding. Based on the similarities we can draw a conclusion and formulate our statement that the term and the structure allow us to consider the concept of praying. If it is the case, this concept involves the whole process from seeking to finding and this demonstrates the theological standpoint of the writer. The occurrence of prayer suggests also the methodology, because the last part of the saying elaborates the constituents: leaving the suffering, disgrace and passions, that is: the illnesses of the body, the soul and the spirit. From our point of view it is not impossible that apart from the source of the saying the writer used other materials concerning the theology of prayer, and the introduction of the term with its implications was an arbitrary modification of the saying to adopt and adapt into this theological system.

4 Dialogue of the Saviour (Dial. Sav.)

The Dialogue of the Savior is a part of the Valentinian tradition. Létorneau’s opinion is that “the Dialogue of the Saviour presents a softer version of Valentinian theology, one less irritating to the new orthodoxy but providing an acceptable baptismal theology for believers of Valentinian origin within the Church.”³⁵

πεχε ἰογλας κε ντακ χω μπαϊ ναν εβολ ρμπνογς ντμμε ροτ[αν] ενωαωλη
 ενα ωλη νω νζε πεχε πχοεic [κε] ωλη ρμπμα ετεμνςζιμε ἡμαγ πεχε
 μαθθαιος κε εφχω ἡμ[οc] ναν κεωλη ρμπμα ετεμνςζιμε ἡμαγ
 κεερικαταλλε νη[ε]ρβογε ντμνςζιμε κεβεχ[πο] αν πε αλλα κεεναογω
 νςε[χπο] πεχε μαριζαμ κε εναφοτογ ε[βολ] αν ωαενεζ πεχε πχοεic κε [νιμ]
 πε ετσοογν κεεναβωλ εβολ [αν] αγω νςεκ[]. [.]ε ντμντ[.....].πος πεχε
 ἰογλας ἡμαθθαιος κε [ε]ναβωλ εβ[ολ] ...ρβογε ντμντ[.....] ναρχω
 [.]ναρεπι...[.]α εναωω[πε] ντζε ενςβτωτ

Judas said, “You have told us this out of the mind of truth. When we pray, how should we pray?” The Lord said, “Pray in the place where there is no woman.” Matthew said, “Pray

35 LÉTORNEAU, *The Dialogue of the Savior*, 98.

in the place where there is [no woman],’ he tells us, meaning ‘Destroy the works of womanhood,’ not because there is any other [manner of birth], but because they will cease [giving birth].” Mary said, “They will never be obliterated.” The Lord said, “Who knows that they will not dissolve and ... [...]?” Judas said to Matthew, “The works of womanhood will dissolve [...] the governors will [...]. Thus will we become prepared for them.” (144:13-145:7).³⁶

Gilhus sees in this passage a special problem about the role played by women among the Gnostic sects: on the one hand, they were permitted a rather free position in relation to the position offered to women in the Christian religion; on the other hand, there is a strong rejection of femininity in the Nag Hammadi texts.³⁷ Female nature and especially female sexuality had a negative symbolic value and they were both strongly condemned. According to others, the anti-marriage attitude appears here and it represents an encratite influence which is visible in a couple of other places in the Dialogue of the Savior as well.³⁸ Pagels ranks our Dialogue together with the Book of Thomas and the Paraphrase of Shem and notes that all employ negative female imagery. However, it does not devalue women themselves but rather the work of womanhood, i.e. procreation.³⁹

If we take a closer look at the quotation, we may observe that the Lord’s command has a connection to the Logion 92; this is interpreted to mean: “Destroy the works of womanhood.” This is further explicated to refer to the literal cessation of bearing children. Thus the Dialogue could promote the encratite belief that procreation must cease before salvation can occur.⁴⁰ This is comparable to the saying of Jesus found in the encratite Gospel of the Egyptians: “I came to destroy the works of the female” which is interpreted by the encratites to mean “by ‘female’ desire, and by ‘works’ birth and corruption.”⁴¹

This reconstruction of the tradition’s line is right and easily acceptable. However, none of the commentators—according to my knowledge—considered the role of prayer in this passage, although it stays at the centre of the Saviour’s saying. The disciples used the motif of destruction for the interpretation and

³⁶ EMMEL, Nag Hammadi Codex, 88-90.

³⁷ GILHUS, Gnosticism, 120.

³⁸ DE CONICK, The Dialogue of the Saviour, 184-185.

³⁹ PAGELS, The Gnostic Gospels, 79-81.

⁴⁰ Cf. “Judas said, ‘Why else, for the sake of truth, do they kill and live?’ The Lord said, ‘Whatever is born of truth does not die. Whatever is born of woman dies.’” (Dial. Sav. 140:9-14).

⁴¹ Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.9.63-64; cf. 3.3.12, 3.6.45, 3.9.67, 3.12.86, 3.16.100. For the list, see DE CONICK The Dialogue of the Saviour, 185, for a detailed analysis, BUCKLEY, An Interpretation of Logion 114, and PETERSEN, Zerstört die Werke.

brought into motion the abovementioned tradition of the saying with its negative attitude towards women and birth.

In light of our former results, we suggest that there could be or rather should be a connection between the motifs of prayer and womanhood. In the former logion of the Book of Thomas was written: “Watch and pray that you may not come to be in the flesh, but that you may leave the bondage of the bitterness of this life.” Here the Saviour gives instructions concerning the right mode and place of prayer, and Matthew’s solution is the destruction of the works of womanhood. The Saviour’s sentence could be an allusion to Matthew’s Gospel (6:6: “But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you”). I suppose that this is the reason why Matthew answered in such a way in the Dialogue. But what is more important is that here the prayer has a similar function as in the former sayings. This does not lead literally to the motif of rest but seems to have a similar result. In this symbolic language the cessation of birth and “the rest and rule” can be identical as the targets or result of prayer.

5 The Valentinian Tradition

5.1 Heracleon

As it is well known, the earliest commentary on the Gospel of John comes from Heracleon who belongs to the Valentinians. Origen preserved in his own Commentary on the Gospel of John some fragments from this “heretical” writing. There are some fragments that deal with the question of true prayer, commenting on Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman.⁴²

I quote a part of frag. 20:

ὁρος μὲν τὸν διάβολον λέγεσθαι ἢ τὸν κόσμον αὐτοῦ, ἐπεὶ περ μέρος ἐν ὃ διάβολος ὅλης τῆς ὕλης, φησὶν, ἦν, ὃ δὲ κόσμος τὸ σύμπαν τῆς κακίας ὁρος, ἔρημον οἰκητήριον θηρίων, ᾧ προσεκύνουν πάντες οἱ πρὸ νόμου καὶ οἱ ἐθνικοί· Ἱεροσόλυμα δὲ τὴν κτίσιν ἢ τὸν κτίστην, ᾧ προσεκύνουν οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι. Ἀλλὰ καὶ δευτέρως ὁρος μὲν ἐνόμισεν εἶναι τὴν κτίσιν ἢ <οἱ> ἐθνικοί προσεκύνουν· Ἱεροσόλυμα δὲ τὸν κτίστην <ᾧ> οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι ἐλάτρευον.

⁴² See, e.g. frag. 24, on John 4:24: “Those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” Worthily of the one who is worshiped, in a spiritual, not a fleshly fashion. For those who have the same nature as the Father are themselves spirit, and they worship in truth, not in error, as the Apostle teaches when he calls this kind of piety “a rational service” (Rom 12:2).

Ὑμεῖς οὖν, φησὶν, οἶονεῖ οἱ πνευματικοὶ οὔτε τῇ κτίσει οὔτε τῷ δημιουργῷ προσκυνήσετε, ἀλλὰ τῷ πατρὶ τῆς ἀληθείας

The mountain represents the Devil, or his world, since the Devil was one part of the whole of matter, but the world is the total mountain of evil, a deserted dwelling place of beasts, to which all who lived before the law and all Gentiles render worship. But Jerusalem represents the creation or the Creator whom the Jews worship... The mountain is the creation which the Gentiles worship, but Jerusalem is the creator whom the Jews serve. You then who are spiritual should worship neither the creation nor the Craftsman, but the Father of Truth.⁴³

This interpretation is on John 4:21: “Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.’”

The fragment was already disputed in modern literature. There are scholars who accepted that Heracleon, according to whom mankind has a fix division, describes in the fragment the conversion of the spiritual.⁴⁴ Others, as e.g. Dundenberg—when examining the fragment together with the interpretation of the healing of the officer’s son—argued for the view that Heracleon has two different kinds of conversion in mind.⁴⁵

If we focus on the text, we can certainly identify three tripartite lists in this allegorical exegesis: the places—the mountain, Jerusalem and *anywhere* (neither on the mountain nor in Jerusalem); the type of worshipper: the gentiles, the Jews and the spiritual ones, and the objects of worship: devil (or the part of matter) or the creation, and the Creator and the Father of truth. According to the Valentinian exegesis, only the last one reaches the truth: the spiritual one (in this case the Samaritan woman) anywhere (neither on the mountain nor in Jerusalem) worships the Father of truth.

If we attempt to interpret this tripartite structure with the Valentinian teaching of its different views about spiritual and animate and earthly classes of humankind or the three different *stages* in the human history,⁴⁶ we are faced with some uncertainty concerning the role of the mountain.⁴⁷ This causes a discrepancy between this account and the teaching mentioned, because Heracleon

⁴³ The quotation is from Diogenes (Origenes, *Comm. Jo.* XIII 16,95-96).

⁴⁴ FOERSTER, Von Valentin zu Herakleon; and SAGNARD, La Gnose Valentinienne.

⁴⁵ DUNDENBERG, Gnostic Morality, 137-148. Similar conclusion in WUCHERPENNIG, Heracleon Philologus, 356-357.

⁴⁶ WUCHERPENNIG, Heracleon Philologus, 299 hints at Foester who made the differentiation between the types of worship (FOERSTER, Von Valentin zu Herakleon, 19).

⁴⁷ For the different Valentinian theories of classes of humankind, see especially the chapter of DUNDENBERG, Gnostic Morality, 137-148.

identified the mountain with the creation, with the evil at first, and then with Jerusalem. We do not expect such an inconsistency from a teacher. In other words, he seems to have used a two-sided differentiation instead of the tripartite model. The next problem that ensues from this deficient model is the absence of the Christian Church, because in other occurrences this was the object of critique.

Both features mentioned were questioned already in modern literature. Firstly, if we suppose the New Testament verses in the background the mountain could be the Mount Gerizim. Secondly, in his teachings concerning the classes Heracleon—as Dundenberg describes—did not use the distinction to separate two kinds of Christians (namely the psychic ones and the spirituals). Instead, he placed the Jews, who worship the creator-God, in the middle category of the animate, psychic ones. The spiritual ones are all those who worship the true God in spirit and truth.⁴⁸ His conclusion is:

that Heracleon used the division of humankind into three classes to make an ethnic argument: all Christians belong to a different, more advanced class of people than the Jews. Heracleon, in other words, posited one version of the popular idea that Christians form “a third race,” distinct both from the pagans and the Jews.⁴⁹

Although this could be right, I incline to pursue this line of argumentation further and search for another solution. For this we should accept that in the frame of this allegorical exegesis, Heracleon apparently identified his own interpretation with the Christian standpoint that follows the biblical text closely. In the Johannine verses we read that Jesus’ promise of the new worship in spirit and in truth is built on his distinction between the God and Father, as the objects of two different worships. In its interpretation, the allegorical exegesis of Heracleon utilized this distinction and made an attempt to hold up his own tripartite structure of humanity with this promise. That is why there is no real distinction between the worships of gentiles and the Jews in the allegorical exegesis and that is why he wrote about the falsity of the old type of worship, whether it be heathen worship of the devil as symbolized by the worship on Mount Gerizim or the Jewish worship of the creator God as symbolized by the worship at Jerusalem. Heracleon understood Jesus’ words about the true and spiritual worship from his own Valentinian perspective, with the pre-existent Father of Truth whom the spiritual ones worship (with the rational service, the Pauline term comes from Rom 12:2) in the frame of his Valentinian thinking pattern. The

⁴⁸ DUNDENBERG, *The School of Valentinus*, 80.

⁴⁹ DUNDENBERG, *The School of Valentinus*, 80.

spiritual ones are represented by the Samaritan woman and through her the promised *pneumatikos* Church.⁵⁰

5.2 Gospel of Philip (Gos. Phil.)

In the Gospel of Philip the term prayer has four occurrences.

NETCITE ZN TPPOY PAΓWOCZ ZM PPOYM TPPOY PE PKOCMOC PPOYM PE PKEAIWN
 MAPNCITE ZM PKOCMOC XEKAAC ENNAWZC ZM PPOYM DIA TOYTO PWYE EPON
 ETHTPPOYANH' ZN TPPOY PIEBOA ZN TPPOY PE PPOYM EPWA OYA AE WCZ ZN TETPOY
 EQNAWCZ AN ALLA EQNAZWAE ZWC PAE[I N]TEEIMEINE EQNATEYE KAPPOC [NAC] AN
 Those who sow in winter reap in summer. The winter is the world, the summer is the other
 aeon. Let us sow in the world that we may reap in the summer. Therefore it is appropriate
 for us not to pray in the winter. Summer follows winter. But if any man reap in winter he
 will not actually reap but only pluck out, since it will not provide a harvest for such a per-
 son (52,25-33).⁵¹

To understand the symbolism of this passage it is worth noting the dualistic composition that uses the symbol of winter and summer to oppose the present world with the heavenly *aeon*. The writer seemingly gives no further hints to help us interpret the rejection of prayer in this world. Segelberg called it an anti-prayer text.⁵² Wilson noted that the reference to prayer presents some difficulties although he supposed the identification of sowing with the procreation and mentioned the Gnostic group who, according to Clement of Alexandria and Origen, rejected prayer.⁵³

50 In the line of the Valentinian interpretation we mention only the concept of Ptolemaeus. In his *Letter to Flora* (33.5.8-13) he gives an entirely practical reading of the Law with the aim for moral improvement. Concerning the religious acts (prayer, thanksgiving, offering) he seems to follow the abovementioned Thomasine trend: “The third subdivision of God’s law is the symbolic part, which is after the image of the superior, spiritual realm: I mean, what is ordained about offerings, circumcision, the Sabbath, fasting, Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the like... For the Savior commanded us to offer offerings, but not dumb beasts or incense: rather, spiritual praises and glorifications and prayers of thanksgiving, and offerings in the form of sharing and good deeds. And he wishes us to perform circumcision, but not circumcision of the bodily foreskin, rather of the spiritual heart, and to keep Sabbath, for he wants us to be inactive in wicked acts; and to fast, though he does not wish us to perform physical fasts, rather spiritual ones, which consist of abstinence from all bad deeds.”

51 LAYTON, Nag Hammadi, 1: 144.

52 SEGELBERG, *Prayer Among the Gnostics?*, 56.

53 WILSON, *The Gospel of Philip*, 69-70.

The next reference to prayer can help us uncover the meaning of this apparently obscure rejection.

πεχαδ̣ χε παειωτ̣ ετ̣ζ̣μ̣ πεθ̣ηπ̣ πεχαδ̣ χε βωκ̣ εζο̣υν̣ επεκ̣ταμε̣ιον̣ ν̣γ̣ω̣τα̣μ̣
 μ̣πεκ̣ρο̣ ερωκ̣ ν̣γ̣ω̣λη̣ν̣ απεκ̣ειωτ̣ ετ̣ζ̣μ̣ πεθ̣ηπ̣ ετε̣ παει̣ πε̣ πετ̣ζ̣ι̣ σα̣ ν̣ζο̣υν̣
 μ̣μο̣ο̣υ̣ τη̣ρο̣υ̣ πετ̣ζ̣ι̣ σα̣ ν̣ζο̣υν̣ δε̣ μ̣μο̣ο̣υ̣ τη̣ρο̣υ̣ πε̣ π̣π̣λη̣ρω̣μα̣ μ̣μ̣ν̣ν̣σ̣ω̣δ̣ μ̣ν̣ βε̣
 μ̣πεδ̣σα̣ ν̣ζο̣υν̣ παει̣ πε̣ ετο̣υ̣ω̣α̣χε̣ ερο̣δ̣ χε̣ πετ̣μ̣π̣σα̣ ν̣τ̣πε̣ μ̣μο̣ο̣υ̣
 He said: My Father who is in secret. He said: Go into your chamber and shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father who is in secret, the one who is within them all. But that which is within them all is the fullness. Beyond it there is nothing else within it. This is that of which they say, “that which is above them” (68:5-17).⁵⁴

That the first part is a quotation of Matt 6:6 is accepted by all commentators.⁵⁵ Lundhaug argues quite convincingly that the two opposite views refer to the opposition of the outer, loud prayer and the inner, silent prayer that is in the inner chamber (Greek ταμειον).⁵⁶ The reason why I suggest another reading is the end of the quotation. The writer introduces the term of *pleroma* and identifies it briefly with the presence of the Father. This motif leads us further to the third occurrence of prayer that demonstrates the connection between prayer and the bridal chamber.

π̣ετ̣[ο̣υ̣α̣]α̣β̣ ν̣νετο̣υ̣α̣α̣β̣ πε̣ π̣ν̣υ̣μ̣φ̣ων̣ π̣[βα̣πτ̣ι̣]σ̣μα̣ ο̣υ̣ν̣τα̣δ̣ μ̣μα̣υ̣ ν̣ταν̣α̣σ̣τα̣ς̣[ι̣ς̣ μ̣ν̣
 π̣]σ̣ω̣τε̣ επ̣σ̣ω̣τε̣ ζ̣μ̣ π̣ν̣υ̣μ̣φ̣ων̣ [ε̣π̣η̣]γ̣μ̣φ̣ων̣ δε̣ ζ̣μ̣ πετ̣.χο̣σε̣ ερο̣[....]ν̣[.]ο̣ο̣.. κ̣να̣ζε̣
 αν̣ ε̣τε̣ε̣[....]τ̣ω̣π̣ [....] νε̣ νετ̣ω̣λη̣ [.....] θ̣ιε̣ρο̣σ̣ολ̣υ̣μα̣ [.....]θ̣ιε̣ρο̣[σ̣ολ̣υ̣μα̣
 ε̣γ̣ω̣[.....]θ̣ιε̣ρο̣σ̣ολ̣υ̣μα̣ ε̣γ̣δ̣ω̣ψ̣τ̣ [.....] ν̣α̣ει̣ ε̣το̣υ̣μο̣υ̣[τε̣ ε̣ρο̣ο̣υ̣ χε̣ πε̣το̣υ̣α̣α̣β̣
 ν̣νετο̣υ̣α̣α̣β̣

The Holy of the Holies is the bridal chamber. Baptism is the resurrection and the redemption. Redemption is in the bridal chamber, but the bridal chamber is in that which is above [it, to which we belong]. You will not find [like it. Those who receive it] are those who pray [in spirit and in truth. They do not pray] in Jerusalem. [There are some in] in-

⁵⁴ LAYTON, Nag Hammadi, 1: 176.

⁵⁵ TUCKETT, Nag Hammadi, 75, and he adds: “Within Matthew’s gospel, this is part of the ‘M’ material, i.e. material peculiar to Matthew. The ultimate origin of the tradition is uncertain, and it is not clearly redactional. Thus the presence of this saying in the Gospel of Philip cannot prove that the latter presupposes Matthew’s gospel, rather than Matthew’s source here. However, given the dependence of the Gospel of Philip on Matthew’s redactional work which we have already seen, the use of the saying here fits well with the theory that the Gospel of Philip is dependent on Matthew,” TUCKETT, Nag Hammadi, 75-76.

⁵⁶ LUNDHAUG, Images of Rebirth, 335-337.

deed praying in] Jerusalem, [but] waiting [for the mysteries] that are called the Holy of the Holies (69:24-35).⁵⁷

If this reconstruction is correct, we can say that prayer in spirit and truth is an allusion to Jesus' saying in John 4:23. The imagery of the bridal chamber is diverse in Gos. Phil. and in scholarly literature it received various interpretations (as a single ritual, a sequence of rituals or as the inner or hidden meaning of one or more rituals).⁵⁸ For our purposes the key is the familiarity of the bridal chamber and the true prayer on the one hand and the symbolism of the temple in Jerusalem on the other. The interpretation associates in an obvious way the true prayer and the holy of the holies and brings into this complex connexion the concept of redemption.

The last example of the Gos. Phil. fits well into this context. It is about the cup of prayer:

ΠΠΟΤΗΡΙΟΝ ΜΠΩΛΗ ΟΥΝΤΑϞ ΗΡΤ ΜΜΑΥ ΟΥΝΤΑϞ ΜΟΟΥ ΕϞΚΗ ΕΖΡΑΙ ΕΠΤΥΠΟϞ
 ΜΠΕCΝΟϞ ΕΤΟΥΡΕΥΧΑΡΙCΤΕΙ ΕΧΩϞ ΑΥΩ ΦΜΟΥΖ ΕΒΟΛ ΖΜ ΠΠΝΑ ΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ ΑΥΩ ΠΑ
 ΠΤΕΛΕΙΟC ΤΗΡϞ ΡΡΩΜΕ ΠΕ ΖΟΤΑΝ ΕΝΩΑΝCΩ ΜΠΑΕΙ ΤΝΑΧΙ ΝΑΝ ΜΠΤΕΛΕΙΟC ΡΡΩΜΕ
 The cup of prayer contains wine and water. For it is laid down as the type of the blood over
 which thanks is given. And it fills with holy spirit and that is of the perfect human. When
 we drink, we drink the perfect human (75:14-21).⁵⁹

It belongs to the sacramental theology that has much in common with contemporary Christian theology. The sentences clearly express the transformation of the visible elements into sacraments and imply that one who participates in them receives their divine reality, the invisible qualities of the Holy Spirit and the perfect human. In agreement with De Conick's statements we can say that "the Eucharist sacrament is another ritual activity referred to by Philip. It seems to correspond to the Holy of the Holy shrine, the shrine closely tied to 'redemption' (69:23)."⁶⁰ One thus puts on the perfect man not only in baptism, but also in the Eucharist, and consequently the fact that the Eucharistic cup contains water in addition to wine may be seen as an additional reference to baptism.⁶¹

⁵⁷ LAYTON, Nag Hammadi, 1: 180. In the translation I follow van Os who accepted Schenke's reconstruction, VAN OS, Baptism, 60 and 189.

⁵⁸ For the detailed analysis with bibliographical data, see LUNDHAUG, Images of Rebirth, 331-334.

⁵⁹ LAYTON, Nag Hammadi, 1: 182.

⁶⁰ DE CONICK, The True Mysteries, 239.

⁶¹ LUNDHAUG, Images of Rebirth, 252.

The symbol of the cup of prayer matches with the concept of prayer and could refer to the Eucharistic prayer above the cup that is to unify and transform the receiver. With this description, the concept becomes complete for which the writer gives the instructions: it begins with the rejection of the worldly prayer, then continues with the description of the inner, silent methodology and indicates its symbolic place and finally reaches its complete form in the Eucharistic prayer.

Through the Eucharistic prayer the priest consecrates the elements. If we suppose that mentioning the perfect human is an allusion to the element of bread, then the description resembles closely the contemporary “orthodox” Christian liturgical act. However, the differences are manifest as we take into consideration that there is no mention of words of institution—although it has a resemblance to epiclesis—therefore we should conclude that the concept clearly represents a Valentinian interpretation or instructions for the role and the function of prayer.

5.3 Exegesis of the Soul (NHC II,6)

The Exegesis of the Soul (Exeg. Soul) is a short account of the gnostic myth of Soul, from her fall into a body and the world to the return to her heavenly father’s place.⁶² The main elements of the narrative are the soul’s fall into a body, her defilement, desolation, repentance, regeneration and marriage to the bridegroom, her brother sent from heaven, and, as a result of this saving event, her ascent to the Father.

There are two main topics in the writing: the first is the prostitution, and the second is the repentance, *metanoia*.⁶³

After having related the first steps of the Soul in repentance, the author narrates her purification from uncleanness, her union with her heavenly bridegroom, her emotion in meeting him again, until her final ascension to her Father’s dwelling. This is followed by the writer’s teaching:

ὡςδε θε εὐαγγελ’ επειωτ’ ντῆμογτε εζραῖ εροq 2ῆ τῆψγχι τηρῶ 2ῆ νῆποτοῦ αν
ῆπσα νβολ’ αλλα 2ῆ πνευμα ετ2ι πσα ν2οῦν πεντα2ι εβολ 2ῆ πβαθος ενεω
ε2ομ ενῆμετανοει εχῆ πβιος ντα2ῆννααδ’ ενῆεζομολογει ῆν-ῆ-νοβε εναϊθανε
ετ’πλανη ετῳγειτ’ ταει νενῳοοτ’ ῆ2ητῶ αῳ ατςποῦαν ετῳγειτ’ ενῆιμε ῆεε

⁶² Robinson notes LAYTON, Nag Hammadi, 2:104.

⁶³ SCOPELLO, Practicing Repentance, 199.

ΝΕΝΩΟΟΤΉ Ζῆ ΠΑΛΕ Μῆ ΦΟΕΙΜ ΕΝΨΤΕΝΘΕΙ ΝΑΝ ΟΥΑΔΝ ΧΕΚΑΔC ΕΦΝΑΝΑ ΝΑΝ
ΕΜΜΟCΤΕ ἸΜΟΝ ἸΘΕ ΕΤῆΝῆΖΗΤC ΤΕΝΟΥ

So it is fitting to pray to the Father and to call on him with our soul—not externally with our lips but with the spirit, which is inside and comes from the depths, sighing, repenting for the life we led, confessing the sins, perceiving the deception we were in and the empty haste; weeping over how we lived in darkness and in the wave; mourning for what we were so that he might pity us; hating ourselves for what we still are (135:4-15).⁶⁴

Later the writer adds: “Therefore it is fitting to pray to God night and day” (136:16-17). This teaching is very similar to the Pauline order from 1 Thessalonians: *pray without ceasing*, but concerning the passage quoted we could say that the main points of the quotation are as follows. The writing’s conception of μετάνοια is diverse: a multifaceted notion blending together repentance, remorse, compunction, penitence and conversion. According to Scopello, on this point our tractate differs greatly from a large amount of gnostic texts where μετάνοια is conceived as an ἐπιστροφή, an intellectual return to oneself, without any penitential content, a concept rooted in Hellenistic philosophical context.⁶⁵ The symbolism of this passage is built undoubtedly on biblical heritage. Scopello’s supposition is that the technical terminology of prayer employed shows clearly the influence of the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha⁶⁶ but at this point we are rather inclined to accept Kulawik’s statement who points to the Jewish-Christian tradition.⁶⁷ Scopello could have been right only in a limited way because in the quotation—as it is mentioned—there could be allusions to 1 Cor 2:10-11 and the sequence has been inspired by two passages from the Gospels which the author quotes at the end of this exhortatory section. Matt 5:4 (in 135:16-17: μακάριοι οἱ πενθοῦντες) has provided the term πενθεῖν, and the allusion to Luke 14:26 has suggested to the author the term μισεῖν. (“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple”).

As Scopello emphasized, some details are provided here on the metanoia’s condition: it has to be inner and spiritual. It has to be accompanied by sorrow and repentance for past life and by a confession of sins. The consciousness of having sinned is a crucial moment. Sins are identified here with “vain deceit” which characterized life, and with the great deal of time spent on “futile matters.”

⁶⁴ LAYTON, Nag Hammadi, 2: 160-162.

⁶⁵ SCOPELLO, Practicing Repentance, 205.

⁶⁶ For this see, with examples SCOPELLO, Practicing Repentance, 209-210.

⁶⁷ KULAWIK, Die Erzählung über die Seele, 232.

Summary: the quotation gives a real instruction for the commendable method of praying with exemplifying the inner prayer. Moreover, this prayer must not be pronounced aloud; it has to be silent.

If we turn to the supposed listeners or users of this text, the instructions indicate for them the path to recovering their original place in the heavenly house. For this the adept should interiorize the myth and identify themselves with the Soul or with Kulawik's words: what was the Soul in myth, we should do with our own whole soul.⁶⁸

The second example of Exeg. Soul comes at the end of the writing, where the author interposes again with a personal address to his readers, and draws some concrete teaching from the earlier sayings quoted from the Prophets. The main difference is that the writer seemingly changes the addressee of the prayer because here it is addressed to God, while in the former passage it was addressed to the Father.

ζωστε ψψε αἰπροσευχεςθαι επνουτε ντογψη μν περοου εἰμψρω ννδix
εζραϊ εἰροq νθε ννετqν τμητε νθαλασσα εππλεα ψαψαηα επνουτε qm
πουζητ τηρq qννουzyποκριc αν xε νεἰπροσευχεςθαι qννουzyποκριc
εγαπατα μμοου ογατου

So we need to pray (προσεύχεσθαι) God night and day, lifting our hands to him as those who are in the middle of the tempestuous sea, pray to God with all their heart without any hypocrisy (ὑπόκρις). In fact, those who pray with hypocrisy deceive themselves (136:16-22).⁶⁹

This quotation also maintains the necessity of prayer. Before analyzing the theological patterns of the passage we turn to the main motifs. Scopello stated that the comparison with sailors who pray to God in the middle of the storm echoes a traditional theme of Jewish Intertestamental literature, which, with the help of sea images, describes the human condition in the earthly life with passions. As she argues: These sorts of images are used in Essenic literature, in T. Ab. 17:25, in the Greek fragments of 1 En. 97 and 101 and also in T. Naph. 6:49. Philo turns quite often to this image in his own allegoric works, where the tempestuous sea is a metaphor for the passions shaking the soul.⁷⁰ The motif of hypocrisy could be an allusion to Jesus' warning from Matt 6:5 or any state of its history of tradition.

⁶⁸ KULAWIK, *Die Erzählung über die Seele*, 232.

⁶⁹ LAYTON, *Nag Hammadi*, 2: 164.

⁷⁰ SCOPELLO, *Practicing Repentance*, 212.

In addition to this interpretation it is worth noting that the description continuing the former instructions maintains the necessity of the ceaseless prayer while accompanying it with its appropriate posture. In doing so, it gives instruction for the body and the heart, supposedly with the aim to create an inner cohesion between the components of man on the one hand, and on the other, to make the demarcation line firm between the true and the hypocritical practice of prayer. It could allude to the fact that it is not a purely intellectual way but a process for which both the body and the heart are required. In this passage the addressee of the prayer has changed, it is God and not the Father, as it was in the former passage.

Both passages present the concept of the ceaseless prayer to the Father or to God with its methodology. By giving the description the text explains how prayer should be performed with cultivating the detachment from the senses, to transcend the physical reality and to attain the prayer with heart to God, the Father. However, the most important feature could be that in the Exeg. Soul this prayer as a guidance to the soul must be understood as a silent prayer.

6 Apocryphon of John (Ap. John)

The aforementioned examples illustrate the earthly context of the incarnate or the resurrected Saviour. But the codices offer other examples too, and some of them have connection with the creation as well. These examples come from the heavenly world and serve as models for the earthly followers.

The Apocryphon of John is probably the best known and the most disputed tractate from the Nag Hammadi Library. Most of the commentators classify it with the Sethian school of ancient Gnostic thought.⁷¹ We turn to this tractate for the examination of an aspect of the metanoia and prayer that has not yet been mentioned.

Concerning the context it is worth noting some introductory sentences about the Sethian chain of being. The metaphysical hierarchy of the Sethian treatises is headed by a supreme and pre-existent Unknowable One, the Father or Invisible Spirit who is beyond being. Below the supreme One, there is the Barbelo Aeon, the maternal figure, the Father's first Thought. The third being is their self-generated Child Autogenes.

⁷¹ For this see, e.g. SCHENKE, *Das sethianische System*, 165-173; TURNER, *Sethian Gnosticism: A Literary History*; and his monograph: *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition*.

The method of theogonical, emanative process in the Apocryphon of John—similarly to a mental process—runs as follows: the Invisible Spirit emanates an overflow of luminous water in which he sees a reflection of himself; this self-vision then “first manifests” itself as the second principle Barbelo, the divine First Thought. In turn, Barbelo contemplates the same luminous water from which she had originated in order to generate the third principle, the divine Autogenes as the “First Appearance” of the Invisible Spirit’s first power.

To sum up, I quote Pleše’s evaluation regarding the emanative process: Ennoia–Barbelo who “looks into the pure light” of God, then “commits the act of ‘conversion’ (*epistrophe*), or “turns herself” to God, and, by giving birth to Christ, the Self-Originate, activates the faculty of intellection, or Intellect (*Nous*), capable of articulating her intuitive notion of God into a signifying chain of distinct dispositions.⁷² This conversion serves as a heavenly model for Sophia in her repentance.

Thereafter the events of the *Pleroma*, the subsequent appearance of the *aeons*, has a narrative logical order: requesting the gift – granting – taking.⁷³ This tripartite order becomes recognizable in the following examination of Sophia’s prayer in a slightly modified way.

6.1 Sophia’s Repentance in Apocryphon of John

Sophia, the Wisdom is the last of the twelve, the lowest *aeon* in the *pleroma*, the fullness, the heavenly world. Before the examination of her repentance it is worth noting some features of her myth to indicate her redemptive and revelative roles in the cosmogonical story.

Sophia’s desire was to look into the pure light and bring forth an image out of herself in imitating Barbelo’s act. Although it was without the consent of the divine Father and without her mate—on account of her element that is the invincible power (II 10.1 τὸ μ ... ΝΑΤΧΡΟ ΕΡΟΣ) or her impetuous, licentious nature (BG 37.1 ΠΕΠΡΟΥΝΙΚΟΝ) or her guarding element (III 15.3 ΠΕΠΦΡΟΥΝΙΚΟΝ)—she was filled and brought forth a product. This product came out as imperfect, different from his mother’s form and not resembling the image of his mother; he is a dark miscarriage (BG 46.10), the garment of darkness (II 13.33). This product is a serpent-like, lion-like typos or form (*morphe*), the first archon, the creator of the material world. Sophia hides her product, but the archon begins to create and

⁷² PLEŠE, Poetics of the Gnostic Universe, 129.

⁷³ PLEŠE, Poetics of the Gnostic Universe, 48.

call into being his sons, the other archons. Thereafter the story line turns back to Sophia; here I quote the text of the longer redaction from Codex II:

When the mother realized that the garment of darkness had not come out perfectly, she understood that her consort had not agreed with her. She repented with much weeping (II 13:32-14:1).

These sentences—as a reaction to Jaldabaoth’s villainy—are to explain Sophia’s repentance (*metanoëin*). In agreement with Pleše’s opinion one can say that all versions demonstrate that Sophia’s repentance is the reaction to Jaldabaoth’s theft, and not to his creative act, “the reaction triggered as soon as Sophia became aware of her deficiency and able to foresee the ‘forthcoming’ separation, or ‘apostasy,’ of her son.”⁷⁴ To illustrate this process we turn to the former passages:

And I said: Lord what does it mean, she came and went? But he smiled and said. Do not think that it is as Moses said: over the waters. No, but when she saw the evil that had come to be and the theft committed by her son, she repented. And forgetfulness came to her in the darkness of ignorance. And she began to feel shame with a movement. Now, the movement is to come and go (II 13:17-27).

These sentences describe the reaction of Sophia. The second one presents an exegetical aspect concerning the Mosaic text and seems to be an allusion to Gen 1:2b on the movement of the Spirit upon the waters. The writer of the Apocryphon—here the figure who reveals—rejects what follows in the biblical text and uncovers the meaning of the “rushing over the waters,” the *epipheresthai*. However, he equates the biblical term with being ashamed and moving disorderly in darkness of ignorance. In other words, in the description of Sophia’s repentance the key motif is the biblical term and context of creation.

The reason why this part of the dramatic story is important here is the description of Sophia’s movement. This account narrates step by step Sophia’s repentance. It starts with recognizing the loss of power and continues with her recognizing her miscarriage and ends with her ascending to the ninth heaven. All three steps run parallel with the acts of the archon and his creation. If we take a closer look and search for another reading of the story we could distinguish two aspects. It has an outer aspect that describes the movement in the darkness. However, it has an ethical sense as well, which allows for a reading in

74 Cf. PLEŠE, Poetics of the Gnostic Universe, 176.

terms of the internal movement of repentance, that involves shame, disorderly motion and weeping. Both of them indicate the real phases of repentance.

In the story of the Ap. John after the invisible Spirit had heard Sophia's prayer of repentance along with her brothers he "poured over her a spirit from the fullness" and "her consort came down to her."⁷⁵ From this description becomes visible the first reason for quoting this passage. At this point of the story line—as in the last part of the first quotation—repentance is followed by the receiving of the spirit as the end of the process. If we accept the results of Pleše, we can conclude briefly that the features of this description lead us back to the New Testament writings, since the baptism of repentance, proclaimed by John the Baptist, along with Peter's Pentecost order to "repent and get baptized ... for the forgiveness of sins" and for receiving the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38) has similar features. These verses from the New Testament could serve as narrative models for Sophia's own baptism of repentance.⁷⁶

The second reason comes from our former investigation and is particularly interesting for the present purposes. The characterization of repentance and prayer, their lexical and thematic similarities are very striking to the part from the Exegesis of the Soul examined earlier. In that writing this concept was connected to the movement of the soul as a theological and psychological teaching. In this version, as a part of the myth of Sophia, it broadens the portrayal of the heavenly *aeon*, and moreover, it has cosmological connotations. As the soul creates her circumstances, so does Sophia lead with her activity the mythical story to the creation of the world, and for both figures the possibility of escape to the original place comes with repentance.

In both narratives the concepts of metanoia have similar features: prayer, passion, distress, shame and also tears. Both the soul and Sophia become weak, lacking coherence (*atonos*), stability and consistent direction. Both flutter, move in a disorderly way, shaken and disturbed in distress. The manner in which both passages describe conversion reveals a psychological point of view. It could mean that this myth is able to operate at individual and universal levels, ethical and noetic, psychological and cosmological levels.

⁷⁵ The whole realm of fullness heard her prayer of repentance and offered praise on her behalf to the invisible virgin spirit, and the spirit consented. When the invisible spirit consented, he poured over her a spirit of the fullness. For her consort did not come to her on his own, but he came to her through the fullness, so that he might restore what she lacked. She was taken up not to her own *aeon*, but to a position above her son. She resides in the ninth heaven until she rectified her lack.

⁷⁶ PLEŠE, *Poetics of the Gnostic Universe*, 247.

The main differences appear in the outcomes. After Sophia's repentance she ascends into the ninth heaven—above the place of her product, but not into her original place. It means that she remains in her fallen state. From this scene the cosmological implications can be deduced: her descent and ascent carries a cosmic significance.

However, the ultimate consequences lead back into the psychological interpretation and from this we can formulate the gnostic theological explanation that is totally other than the Christian solution from where the writer borrowed the main element of this mythical story. The matter and the world created out of it is nothing else than the product of false reasoning/desire of Sophia in this mythical story and the metanoia is the healing process in this effort.

At this point becomes acceptable—within certain limits—Perkins' explanation: the truth to which the gnostic comes by repeating the Sophia stories is not the pathos of a suffering victim but the appropriation of a new identity that is not given in the established, social, religious, and symbolic world that he or she shares with the rest of humanity.⁷⁷ In our interpretation Sophia's role and function serve as a model in this narrative—that is, to give an explanation of how the world came to be—in particular concerning the concept of prayer.

Finally, regarding the parallels we should point out a new role of prayer. In this mythical narrative—as in the myth of the Soul—prayer has its own function in repentance. Earlier, in the Book of Thomas we came across a saying about the works of womanhood that man can destroy with prayer. Our conclusion is that these quotations not only illustrate the two opposite sides of a theological teaching but can also uncover a process that started with the works of womanhood (as a deficiency of womanhood) and through the myth of the soul reached its end with the fully developed myth of Sophia and prayer was a recurrent and determining element of all phases.

6.2 Apocalypse of James (Apoc. Jas.)

In the pseudonymous writing a relatively long prayer (V.62:12-63:29) appears that is also important for our examination. Its close context is the martyrdom of James.

In a hole he stretched his arms and prayed with these words:

⁷⁷ PERKINS, *Sophia as Goddess*, 102.

ΠΑΝΟΥΤΕ ΑΓΩ ΠΑΙΩΤ' ΠΕΝΤΑΦΝΑΖΜΕΤ' ΕΒΟΛ ΖΝ †ΖΕΛΠΙΣ ΕΣΜΟΟΥΤ'
 ΠΕΝΤΑΦΤΑΝΖΟΕΙ ΖΝΝ ΟΥΜΥΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ ΝΤΕ ΠΕΤΕ ΖΝΑΦ ΝΕΚΤΡΕΥΩΣΚ ΝΑΪ ΝΒΙ ΝΕΪΖΟΟΥ
 ΝΤΕ ΠΕΪΚΟΣΜΟΣ ΑΛΛΑ ΠΕΖΟΟΥ ΝΤΕ ΠΕΚΟΥΘΕΙΝ 6-†Π[...]ΥΟΧΤΊ ΝΖΗΤ[11-]Υ Υ[12-]ΩΝ
 ΑΝΟΥ|ΧΑΪ· ΒΟΛΤ' ΕΒΟΛ ΝCΑΒΟΛ ΜΠΕΙΜ|Α ΝΒ|ΟΕΙΛΕ· ΜΠΤΤΡΕΦΩΧΤΊ ΝΖΗΤ' ΝΒΙ
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 ΕΦΖΟΟΥ ΑΝΙΤ' ΕΒΟΛ ΖΝΝ ΟΥΜΖΑΟΥ ΕΙΟΝΖ· ΧΕ ΦΟΝΖ ΝΖΗΤ' ΝΒΙ ΠΕΚΖΜΟΤ' ΠΕΡΩC ΕΡ
 ΖΩΒ ΝΟΥΖΩΒ ΝΤΕ ΟΥΠΛΗΡΩΜΑ· ΝΑΖΜΕΤ' ΕΒΟΛ ΖΝΝ ΟΥCΑΡΞ ΝΝΟΒΕ· ΧΕ ΑΪΤΩΤ' ΝΖΗΤΚ
 ΖΝ ΤΑΒΟΜ ΤΗΡC· ΧΕ ΝΤΟΚ ΠΕ ΠΩΝΖ ΝΤΕ ΠΩΝΖ· ΝΑΖΜΕΤ' ΕΒΟΛ ΖΊΤΟΟΤQ ΝΝΟΥΧΑΧΕ
 ΝΕΦΘΒΒΙΟ· ΝΕΚΤΑΑΤ' ΕΤΟΟΤQ ΝΝΟΥΡΕΦ†ΖΑΠ· ΝΡΕΦΩΩΩΤ' ΕΒΟΛ ΖΜ ΠΝΟΒΕ· ΚΩ ΝΑΪ
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 ΠΕΚΖΜΟΤ' ΑΪΡΑΡΝΙCΘΕ ΝΟΥΟΝ ΝΙΜ· ΝΤΟΚ ΔΕ ΑΪΟΥΟΝΖΚ ΕΒΟΛ· ΝΑΖΜΕΤ' ΕΒΟΛ ΖΝΝ
 ΟΥΘΑΪΨΙC ΕCΖΟΟΥ· †ΝΟΥ ΔΕ ΠΟΥΟΙΕΩ| ΠΕ ΑΓΩ ΤΟΥΝΟΥ ΤΕ ΠΠ|ΝΑ] ΕΤΟΥΑΑΒ
 ΜΑΤ'ΝΝΟΟΥ ΖΑ|ΡΟΪ ΝΟΥΟΥΧ|Α|ΠΟΥΘΕΙΝ| ΠΟΥΘΕΙΝ [...]Ε†·ΗΥ[ΖΝ ΟΥΒΟΜ[...]

My God and my father, who saved me from this dead hope, who made me alive through a mystery of what he wills, do not let these days of this world be prolonged for me, but the day of your light [...] remains in [...] salvation. Deliver me from this place of sojourn! Do not let your grace be left behind in me, but may your grace become pure! Save me from an evil death! Bring me from a tomb alive, because your grace—love—is alive in me to accomplish a work of fullness! Save me from sinful flesh, because I trusted in you with all my strength, because you are the life of the life, save me from a humiliating enemy! Do not give me into the hand of a judge who is severe with sin!⁷⁸ Forgive me all my debts of the days (of my life), because I am alive in you, your grace is alive in me. I have renounced everyone, but you I have confessed. Save me from evil affliction! But now is the time and the hour. O Holy Spirit, send me salvation [...] the light [...] the light [...] in a power [...]. (62:16-63:29).⁷⁹

The prayer has clearly distinguishable parts that consist of four strophes:⁸⁰ address, reference to precious benefaction, petition and doxology⁸¹ that have gnostic features (with the aforementioned symbolism of life and creation)⁸² with apparent allusions to New Testament verses. The *communis opinio* of scholarly literature is that the prayer is an independent piece of liturgical tradition and a late addition to the text.⁸³ It has some parallels in contemporary literature (from the Gospel of Thomas through the Pistis Sophia, the Tripartite Tractatus, the Manichean Psalm Book to the Valentinian Exposition and Mandaean Masiqta

⁷⁸ In the translation of this sentence I follow Hedrick's reconstruction.

⁷⁹ HEDRICK, The (Second) Apocalypse of James, 144-148.

⁸⁰ This opinion comes from BÖHLIG-LABIB, Koptisch-gnostische Apokalypsen, 64-65.

⁸¹ The exact division of the prayer, see TRIPP, Worship, 420-421.

⁸² For a general overview, see Kaiser and Plisch's Einleitung, SCHENKE, BETHGE and KAISER, Nag Hammadi Deutsch, 422-424.

⁸³ See e.g. BÖHLIG and LABIB, Koptisch-gnostische Apokalypsen, 64 and FUNK, Die zweite Apokalypse, 211.

liturgy).⁸⁴ Böhlig does not suppose that the prayer has gnostic provenance on the account of its content.⁸⁵ Tripp's opinion is that concerning the main motif the closest parallel comes from the Prayer of the Martyr Polycarp which interprets the martyrdom by analogy with eucharistic offering, as in our case it is paralleled with baptism.⁸⁶

In the case of this prayer of James we exceed the limit of prayer and clearly reach the liturgical aspects of it, particularly its baptismal associations. Tripp's opinion is concerning the context: It remains virtually certain that the prayer of James is from a baptismal setting and reflects a Jewish-Christian baptismal rite in which the candidate, standing in the water, prayed (at dictation?) for the redemptive grace of God in Jesus.⁸⁷ The example and the whole writing comes closer to the tendencies of orthodox Christianity than the Gospel of Thomas and the first Apocalypse of James did, that have in common the negative attitude to prayer, and the latter represents an earlier stage or witness of the James tradition.

7 Conclusions

The questions that were examined are closely connected to the contemporary diverse religious environment, and particularly to contemporary Christian traditions. When Hurtado examined the origins of Christian worship, he gave a definition and stated, that "there are basically two main identifying marks of early Christian worship, when considered its religious context. 1) Christ is revered as divine along with God, and 2) worship of all other gods is rejected."⁸⁸ In this binitarian shape of the traditions prayer was obviously a characteristic feature of the earliest Christians' worship; their prayer practices likewise demonstrate the central place of Jesus in their devotional life.⁸⁹ To complicate this generally true picture even further and to evoke the unmentioned aspect of the Christian

⁸⁴ FUNK, *Die zweite Apokalypse des Jakobus*, esp. 211-220.

⁸⁵ BÖHLIG, *Mysterion*, 112. He argues that the writing can be understood as a report on the sermon of James on the steps of the temple (Pseudo Clemens, *Recog.* I,66-73) and a second report on the stoning of James describing his death as that of a martyr that follows the model of Stephen's martyrdom (in Acts 6-7).

⁸⁶ TRIPP, *Worship*, 421.

⁸⁷ TRIPP, *Worship*, 422.

⁸⁸ HURTADO, *At the Origins*, 39.

⁸⁹ HURTADO, *Lord Jesus Christ*, 613.

worship we should mention its apologetic context. Concerning the place of worship in this situation, we turn to a comment of Eusebius from the beginning of the fourth century:

What pardon will deserve those who turned from the divinities ever recognized by Greeks and barbarians, kings, legislators and philosophers as well, in the cities and in the countryside, through every kind of cult, initiation and mystery, and have chosen what is impious and godless among men?⁹⁰

The sentences indicate the changed situation when the pagan forms of worship became the target of the apologists at the end of a long process, starting from the Pauline speech in Athens (Acts 17:22-31), through the apologists' and theologians' work, until its culmination. With the sentences a changed context could be illustrated with a reference to the custom of daily prayer, its norm, forms, that applied to individual as well as communal types of prayer, and its cycles with specific times and posture, gesture that were developed, and institutionalized in liturgical or private usages, and lastly, the standardization of prayer became apparent. Furthermore, the particulars of early Christian prayer suggest contours of the development of distinctively Christian understandings of God (as Trinity, for example) and the church (as the Body of Christ).⁹¹ When we turn to the contemporary sources, we see that Origen, for instance, reveals the prayer's structure that is inherited from Judaism—praise and thanksgiving, leading to petition and intercession, concluding with a doxology.⁹²

The writings that were under examination are apparently different from the nascent "orthodox" Christian traditions, they do not demonstrate the existence of daily prayer, its structure, and we can only suppose that the authors knew a variety of patterns of private and communal prayers and the practice of praying. Apart from this recognizable border between them, all texts used and utilized elements originated from the biblical materials and the contemporary theological traditions, but the narratives and their theological arrangements are seemingly foreign to them. However, all examples—with their concepts and terminology, the questions that are raised and the answers that are given through them—are embedded in the religious thinking about prayer and echoed their influences. Despite the fact that some of the examples can be located in a trend

90 Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* I, 2, 3.

91 PHILLIPS, Prayer, 31.

92 BRADSHAW, Daily Prayer, 63.

from where traces lead further to Alexandrian theology⁹³ (and from there to Christian asceticism and monastic traditions⁹⁴), as a founding frame for the nascent theology of prayer, there are no (or did not remain) euchological treaties in the primary and secondary sources. As a preliminary result, what the former examples can signify is that our questions cannot be closed in themselves, cannot be evaluated only in the context of the ancient Gnosis but must be considered within the context of religious features of Christian theology.

If we try to sum up the results of this short investigation we should conclude the following.

The selected sayings and passages contain concepts and formulations of prayer and its spherical and earthly representations, and have clear references to concepts of creation and the creator(s) as well in certain cases. These written records of prayer appear to represent mental, rather than verbal activity accompanied by ritual gestures and postures in some cases. Despite the divergent, diverse and heterogeneous sources with their occasionally obvious and fragmentary parts, we may be able to draw up a relatively reliable and comprehensive picture, summed up briefly as follows: prayer is not only an important aspect of the writings as shown by the selected passages—and by the wealth of the unmentioned references to this subject throughout the whole Nag Hammadi Library—but also a central feature of all systems and schools. The second statement that we can draw from the passages about the role of prayer is that most of the examples testify to the prayers as addressed to God, the Father, although there are some cases where it is only presumable.⁹⁵ The third general statement is that these prayers demand not worldly goods, desires or aspirations but salvation or liberation. From this aspect their special feature, the so-called gnostic nature could be unveiled. All examples show different aspects of the saving gnosis with its ever varying scope of saving and liberating power. The focus is on prayer to attain the gnosis, that is, the access to God or the original place, by transcending the created physical world, the place of the temptations, through detachment from the senses, from the body, but it is provided only by God's or his help, in response to prayer with purification and repentance. These features

93 Let it suffice to mention Clemens of Alexandria's and Origen's works or Tertullian's writing in the Latin tradition.

94 To note only one important example: Lundhaug examined the similarities between the Exeg. Soul and Pachomius' and Shenute's writings (via Origenism), LUNDHAUG, *Images of Rebirth*, 142-149.

95 This result supposes the influence of Origenian theology, maintaining that the prayer should be addressed to the Father and that Jesus has a mediating role concerning the prayer.

could make these prayers a paradigm to be followed by the intended audience or these could inspire them how the prayer should be practiced. Within this perspective these types of prayers present special Gnostic spiritual experiences with the aim to establish a saved or liberated existence of the knower.

As a summary, let us look again at the examples. The first ones of the Thomasine tradition shed light on the true prayer and bear witness to a tradition that has a critical attitude to prayer. These sayings introduce Jesus as if he left the framework of the accepted (Jewish and Christian) worship. All sayings, to be sure, seem to allow for the possibility of fasting and prayer, but the formulation in the sayings could hardly be read as a strong encouragement for the practices. In these cases the rejection of the material world is part of the argumentation.

The consequences are apparent in the sayings where the roles of fasting and prayer were opposed. With this case we could demonstrate that the term prayer was regarded as equivalent to seeking and finding and this suggests an arbitrary modification in the terminology in order to express the writer's own theological standpoint on prayer. In Dial. Sav. the disciples used the motif of destruction for the interpretation and brought into motion the abovementioned tradition of the saying with its negative attitude towards women and birth, that is, the physical world.

The fragment of Heracleon understood Jesus' words about the true and spiritual worship from the Valentinian perspective with the pre-existent Father of Truth whom the spiritual ones worship. In the frame of his Valentinian thinking pattern, in this allegorical exegesis prayer was given a second place next to the former types. This reading was synchronized with the type of worships, and denotes the true and spiritual methodology of prayer. The physical world, the creation was equated with the evil's place from where the spiritual ones are able to reach the Father through the true, spiritual prayer.

In the Gospel of Philip we identified a complete concept of prayer. The writer gives detailed instructions to cover every aspect of the true prayer, from the rejection of the worldly prayer, through the description of the inner, silent methodology and its symbolic place, to its complete form in the Eucharistic prayer.

Concerning the common aspects of the Valentinian and Sethian group we have turned to the myths of Soul and of Sophia and we have made an attempt to investigate the parallel features in the concepts of *metanoia* at the level of the human being, of the Soul and of Sophia. Both examples have a strong connection with the concept of pure and true prayer. Both passages exemplify the "embedded" ascent to the Father granted by the act of true prayer in their mythical and theological languages.

The last example belongs to the James tradition. In the case of this prayer of James we exceeded the limits of prayer and clearly reached the liturgical aspects of prayer, particularly its baptismal associations.

Instead of trying to find one ideal of prayer among the ones explored, we should point out a development from ritual action through verbal prayer and prayer that culminates in silent contemplation. The changes—if we accept the relativity of the chronological order—reflect a movement where the focus is first on practical instructions, and later on maintaining the link between the individual's interior conscience and God, the Father.

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